

Crafting Your One-Minute Pitch with Policymakers

How you “pitch,” or introduce, yourself to a policymaker or their staff can pique their interest in you as a constituent and help set the stage for an effective conversation. Whether you are having a call, meeting with a legislator, or bumping into a staff member at a public meeting, having a solid introduction to yourself and the conversation can make all the difference in their receptiveness. Use these tips to create a one-minute pitch that’s memorable, concise, and effective.

There are five basic elements to a one-minute pitch:

1. Name, town, and years you’ve lived in district
2. Occupation, what you do
3. What networks or communities you represent
4. What you are asking them to act on (be specific and concrete)
5. Why you care, and why you and your community want them to take action

Sample Script: “Hi I’m [full name, with prefix if applicable]. I live in [town]. I am a [profession] working on [issue]. I graduated from/ work at [university connection]. I’m here today to discuss [issue] because [why you care, one specific story]. I also represent [#] of people from my [church/department/group/neighborhood] who also vote in your district and are concerned about this issue. [Concise fact about how this impacts their district or their leadership, and why they should act].”

Now that you have a formula, here are some considerations to take as you craft your pitch to policymakers:

Establish that you are a scientist or technical expert; worry less about your niche expertise. If you do have a very relevant expertise to the topic, don’t be shy to share that, in layman terms. However, if your area of expertise isn’t directly related to the issue at hand, don’t hold back from speaking up as an informed constituent otherwise. Your expertise is important, but policymakers often care more that you have *any* science background or affiliation than **about your specific area of expertise**. For example, “We had 7 PhDs in our office the

other day from X institution!” is a common type of report back a staff member would share with your Congress member on why they need to consider this issue.

Take stock of all your assets as a scientist-constituent, not just your specialty. Many of the staff are not niche experts in the policy topic, nor are they looking for that in a high-value constituent. But your broader knowledgebase is almost always more than enough to establish yourself as a constituent voice to hear out. Further, your connections, reach within a community, adaptable skillsets, and access to further information are just a few of the other critical assets to offer in establishing a relationship with your policymaker’s office.

Share your story and local information. Speak about your connection to the district and how long you’ve been or plan to be a voter there. Describe your affiliations with local organizations. These could include faith groups, small business coalitions, flagship universities, alma maters, neighborhoods, or any other communities that the policymaker cares about. This will help you demonstrate your validity and connect yourself to the district and policymaker—without being pigeonholed into your specific expertise. Keep it short and memorable.

Practice with a friend and focus on giving positive feedback. Run through your whole “pitch.” When you’re done, have the person highlight points that were particularly interesting/influential and flag what to add or emphasize.

Keep your eyes on the prize. Staying focused on your core goals for the conversation with your policymakers helps to send the message that you respect their busy schedules and prevents anyone from derailing the discussion.

Remember your pitch is just the start—keep that conversation alive! Sometimes people will be disappointed when they don’t get that immediate commitment they sought after the initial conversation. As disappointing as that may feel, policymakers get an overwhelming range and volume of asks from their constituents and are often hesitant to make a move until they know their constituency will unwaveringly care

about, follow, and hold them accountable for their actions on the issue. That requires a steady drumbeat of communications that builds a rapport with the policymaker and/or their staff. (For more advice on this, check out our guide to meeting with policymakers at www.ucsusa.org/watchdogtoolkit.)

Here are some indicators of having a successful interaction with a policymaker, even if you don't get the immediate "Yes!":

- Policymakers express new inquiries or considerations about your ask (e.g., vote your way on a bill, co-sponsor a bill, or join a caucus you suggest).
- Staff members ask you follow-up questions on the phone or in email (e.g., they ask you to offer advice on policy consideration, or share/review information on an issue).
- They make a public statement on the issue you raised. (e.g., a press release on their website, op-ed in a paper,

floor speech in Congress, or question/comments in a committee hearing)

- They're silent on the issue. Sometimes a policymaker in opposition to science-based safeguards can be very outspoken. You can play a role by asking them to be quiet on an issue (e.g., They usually talk about the risk to business of car emission regulation. If they instead make no statement in opposition to regulation, this is a win.).
- Staff express interest in a longer-term relationship with the office (e.g., They're responsive to your calls, emails, or event invitations.).

For more tips on building relationships with policymakers, go to www.ucsusa.org/watchdogtoolkit. For on-demand webinars on crafting your personal story, check out www.ucsusa.org/scinetworkshops.

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